NIKE MISSILE BATTERY PH-32 MARLTON NJ

History of the Nike Missile Battery PH-32 in Marlton, New Jersey

Hidden within a wooded section of **Marlton, New Jersey**, the former **Nike Missile Battery PH-32** once formed part of the United States' Cold War air defense system. Built during a period of intense geopolitical tension, the installation spent less than a decade actively protecting the region before being abandoned and eventually becoming a quiet — and sometimes troubled — relic of the Cold War.

Cold War Construction and Purpose

The Marlton Nike missile site was constructed in the early 1950s as part of a ring of missile defenses surrounding major American cities. The installation opened in **1955** and served as one of several missile batteries protecting the Philadelphia metropolitan region.

The base used **Nike-Ajax missiles**, the first operational guided surface-to-air missile deployed by the United States. These missiles were designed to intercept enemy bomber aircraft long before they could reach urban targets such as nearby **Philadelphia**.

Like most Nike installations, the Marlton facility was divided into two separate areas:

Launch Area (PH-32L)

- Contained underground missile magazines
- Held missiles stored horizontally beneath reinforced concrete
- Elevators raised missiles to the surface before launch

Control Area (PH-32C)

- Contained radar towers and targeting systems
- Guided missiles toward incoming aircraft

During its operational years, the installation was staffed by dozens of U.S. Army personnel who maintained constant readiness during the height of the Cold War.

Deactivation and Demolition

By the early 1960s, military technology had advanced and many Nike-Ajax sites were replaced by more powerful missile systems.

In **1963**, the Marlton missile battery was officially **decommissioned** as part of a nationwide reduction in older missile installations.

After closure, the property was transferred to local government authorities. Portions of the base were temporarily used for:

- Civil defense operations
- Police and fire training
- Equipment storage

However, most of the structures eventually fell into disrepair. By **1977**, the remaining above-ground buildings were **demolished**, leaving behind only portions of the underground launch structures hidden beneath the wooded property.
Over the following decades, the surrounding land in **Evesham Township** transformed rapidly as suburban housing developments expanded through the region.
Part of the former control area was eventually redeveloped into the **Briarwood residential neighborhood**, while the launch section remained a wooded tract owned by the township.
Because the underground structures still existed beneath the forest floor, the site became something of a curiosity for local residents and teenagers. Informal trails formed through the woods leading toward the abandoned sections of the base.
Over time, authorities reported occasional issues involving trespassing, graffiti, and illegal dumping on the property.

The 2002 Deaths at the Site

In **2002**, the abandoned missile facility drew renewed attention after two tragic incidents occurred within weeks of each other near the property.
On **May 19, 2002**, a woman and her nephew walking along a wooded trail near the site reported a strong odor coming from the woods. When they returned to investigate the source, they discovered the body of **17-year-old Jacob Lee**hanging from a tree near the perimeter of the abandoned base.
Authorities later ruled the death a **suicide**.
Just two weeks later, on **June 2, 2002**, police were again called to the site after the body of **19-year-old Riley Morris** was discovered inside a ladder stairwell leading into the underground portion of the missile installation.
Officials did not publicly release extensive details about the second death, but the close timing and location of the two incidents quickly raised concern among local residents.
Both deaths occurred within the same wooded section of the former missile base.

Closure of the Property

Following the second incident, officials in **Evesham Township** moved quickly to secure the property.
Mayor Gus Tamburro said the deteriorating structures posed a significant safety hazard.
Township crews sealed multiple access points to the underground bunkers, including ladder shafts and stairwell entrances that had allowed people to enter the missile magazines below ground.
The informal trail connecting the nearby **Briarwood neighborhood** to the site was also rerouted and eventually closed.
Officials stated that the closures were intended to prevent further trespassing and reduce the risk of accidents at the unstable Cold War–era facility.

The Site Today

Today, the former **Nike Missile Battery PH-32** remains largely hidden beneath thick woods near residential neighborhoods in Marlton.
Little evidence of the original military installation can be seen from the surface, but underground portions of the missile magazines are believed to still exist beneath the property.